



Sea Star Line, LLC

Clear sailing for inbound document workflow



Sea Star Line offers cargo transportation services from North America to Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Caribbean Islands of Antigua, St. Kitts, St. Maarten, Tortola, and Dominican Republic. Sea Star Line's RO/CON vessels are the most versatile and technologically advanced in the trade — able to carry the widest range of unique and diverse cargoes. To achieve the vision of exceeding customers' expectations by providing the highest quality innovative transportation solutions, these high-speed combination roll-on roll-off/lift-on lift-off ships allow Sea Star Line to offer unique transportation solutions to its customers.

Challenge: Eliminate manual workflow for inbound shipping documents

Prior to implementation of Esker DeliveryWare, Sea Star Line business operations were largely manual and paper-intensive processes. This situation resulted in a vision to create growth, value and opportunity without paper.

"With so many documents coming in via fax and email as well as scan, we knew we wanted an imaging workflow solution," said JoAnn Nordquist, Director of Systems and Programming at Sea Star Line. "We needed to be able to process the documents more quickly and more efficiently, without passing paper. The manual process, even though we were very good at it, was not conducive to growth."

The paper chase

Master bills of lading and other documents were routed to different inboxes and to different individuals who had access to particular inboxes. Often, the Sales department would need information about the status of a customer's shipping order, and the processing staff would have difficulty finding the document. This resulted in the common situation of chasing paper to determine when the document was received and what routing path it took.

"What we wanted to accomplish was leveling out our resources in relation to the workflow," said Nordquist. "This was absolutely impossible with documents coming into all different inboxes. We had no visibility of when documents came in, when they were worked on, who worked them or where the documents were."

Sea Star Line carefully mapped out its process and developed a strategic value assessment (SVA). Of the seven responses to its requests for proposal, Sea Star Line selected Esker and two other vendors to present their solutions based on the SVA. "That's when we saw that the Esker platform, which we were already using for faxing, was the imaging and workflow solution we wanted."

Solution: Esker DeliveryWare

Along with capturing master bills of lading, trucker paperwork and other documents, Sea Star Line needed to identify the types of documents. And within those types, different customers' documents might look different. "Auto-indexing and the capability to teach the system how to process different documents were key features that Esker had and the others didn't," said Nordquist.

The Sea Star Line implementation includes a two-node server cluster at the corporate office and the same configuration at another site for disaster recovery. Esker DeliveryWare interfaces with the company's IVSS back-office system to validate data and archive documents along with an activity log for the shipment in the Ivis system.

Sea Star Line worked with Esker Professional Services to implement the solution. "We will be able to go a lot further with Esker DeliveryWare and do more things on our own because of the knowledge that we gained," said Rachelle Akers, Business Analyst at Sea Star Line.

Excitement around the company grew through a series of "town hall" sessions Sea Star Line held at each location to share information about the benefits of the solution. "People are really amazed at what Esker DeliveryWare can do for them," said Brenda Britt, Assistant Vice President, Financial Services at Sea Star Line. "And it's great to see so many people from groups across the company thinking about how they can use this technology to improve processes in their departments as well."

With Esker DeliveryWare we're able to manage our business based on our volume, not based on theory.

JoAnn Nordquist ■ Director, Systems and Programming
■ Sea Star Line



We have complete visibility into the process and we're able to better measure productivity, identify high-volume hours and plan around that.

Brenda Britt ■ Assistant Vice President, Financial Services ■ Sea Star Line

Benefits

Visibility and customer service

"It has been extremely enlightening to see what a difference this solution makes," said Britt. "Esker DeliveryWare is an excellent management tool that can completely streamline our processes and reduce the number of handoffs. The biggest benefit is visibility into the process and immediately better customer service. Everyone who needs to access a document can access it immediately. Our various port locations are able to see information that they used to have to request by telephone or email and then wait for the information. Now they have the information right at their fingertips. And that's felt throughout the entire company."

Time and cost savings

- **Reduced document processing time by 50%**
- **Reallocated half of staff** in the company's Vessel Matching Reconciliation group
- **Projected ROI within 1 year**, with \$274,000 of total benefit in the first year and \$1.3 million after 3 years

Productivity

According to JoAnn Nordquist, "Esker DeliveryWare helps us optimize productivity on the input of these documents into the system because now we can see what's happening with the documents and how long it takes to process them. We're able to know the number of documents coming in per hour so we can do better workforce planning. And we have the ability to see productivity per hour, per person. The process visibility has helped us better plan and reallocate resources to where they're more needed."

Regulatory compliance support

Esker DeliveryWare also proved invaluable in satisfying the requirements of recently enacted government regulations. "If we did not have the Esker solution it would have been impossible for us to do what we need to do today with these new regulations," said Melanie McCoy, Regulatory Compliance Supervisor at Sea Star Line.

Dispute resolution

On the financial side, Esker DeliveryWare also improved dispute resolution. "If a customer calls and says, 'That's not my bill' or 'I didn't put that information on the document,' we can have the signed document emailed to them immediately," said Britt. "Before, that would take 20 to 30 minutes. Now, while we have the customer on the telephone, we're able to put the document in their hands and resolve issues much sooner."

Auditing

Prior to the Esker solution, Sea Star Line's freight audit department had to retrieve boxes of paper files. Now they can examine documents without leaving their desks.

Future plans

"We are well-positioned right now to switch the whole concept of printing out documents and get rid of paper," said Nordquist. "We want to have everybody working through Esker DeliveryWare to see the workflow that needs to happen. Our objective is to eliminate the paper chase completely on these documents." The company is also replacing JetForm for outbound document delivery.

Invoicing, Accounts Payable and order-to-cash

Phase II of Sea Star Line's Esker DeliveryWare project is to automate invoice delivery and document bundling for systematic distribution of billing documents based on a matrix of customer requirements. Subsequent phases include Accounts Payable workflow automation using the Dynamic Document Capture capability of Esker DeliveryWare, followed by order-to-cash workflow automation to queue master bills of lading and report on production by shipment, employee and other criteria.

"As we work toward our growth initiatives and get into new markets, we would rather put resources where they can best benefit the organization and give our people more opportunities," said Britt. "We're really looking at Esker DeliveryWare to help us achieve those big goals."

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